



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

August 31, 2006

40 Salinas residents arrested in ICE effort targeting criminal alien sex offenders

SALINAS, Calif. – A Mexican national convicted of repeatedly sexually molesting a nine-year-old girl over a period of two years is among the 40 criminal aliens arrested by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents here during the past four months as part of Operation Predator, a nationwide ICE initiative targeting those who prey upon and sexually exploit children.

The most recent arrests occurred Tuesday as ICE agents took seven additional criminal alien sex offenders into custody. ICE was assisted in the operation by the Salinas Police Department Sexual Assault Unit, the California Department of Corrections Parole Division, and the Monterey County Adult Probation Office.

Those arrested during Tuesday's enforcement action include Antonio Cruz, a 43-year-old Mexican national who was convicted in Salinas in 1990 of sexually molesting a four-year-old child. Previous targets included Francisco Prado, 46, a legal permanent resident from Mexico who was taken into custody by ICE agents in May based upon his conviction for repeatedly molesting a nine-year-old girl.

This week's arrests cap a joint effort involving ICE and its local enforcement partners to target foreign nationals in the Salinas area whose criminal convictions for child sex offenses make them potentially deportable from the United States.

One of the subjects arrested during the multi-agency operation is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for re-entering the United States after deportation, a felony charge that carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison. Jesus Salgado-Lopez, 34, was arrested by ICE agents in June. The Mexican national has been deported five previous times.

The cases of the remaining sex offenders, the majority of whom are from Mexico, are being handled administratively. Some of the aliens, because of their illegal immigration status and prior criminal convictions, can be immediately removed from the United States. Others are legal permanent residents who are entitled to a deportation hearing before an immigration judge.

“Pedophiles pose a serious threat to the well-being of our children, our families, and our communities,” said Charles DeMore, special agent-in-charge for the ICE office of investigations in San Francisco, which oversees the agency’s Salinas office as well. “We will continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to target those who prey on the children of this community. In the case of foreign nationals who commit predatory offenses, we can not only take them off of the streets, but we can seek to have them sent out of the country.”

“Operation Predator has been and continues to be a very worthwhile collaboration between federal and local law enforcement,” said Cassie McSorley, Deputy Chief of the Salinas Police Department. “The arrest and removal of these 40 criminal alien sex offenders from Salinas since May of 2006 has made this community a safer place for it’s residents and their children. Working in conjunction with ICE has increased the Salinas Police Department’s resources with which we are able to deal with these types of criminals.”

Since ICE launched Operation Predator in July of 2003, the agency has arrested more than 8,200 sex offenders nationwide. More than 2,000 of those arrests were made by ICE agents in California.

Operation Predator is part of ICE’s expanded interior immigration enforcement strategy, which focuses on identifying and removing criminal aliens, immigration fugitives, and other immigration violators from the United States. The agency’s top priority is arresting and removing foreign nationals who pose a threat to public safety or national security.

Additional information about Operation Predator is available on the Web at www.ice.gov. ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.